

A Homily by the Rev. Dr. Renée Tembeckjian
Trinity Episcopal Church
11 October 2026
Isaiah 25:1-9; Psalm 23; Philippians 4:1-9; Matthew 22:1-14

“Party Clothes”

Whenever we receive an invitation for a special event or occasion, we have a decision to make. If we accept, we usually begin thinking about what to bring or consider what we will wear. If we decline, we ponder what to say, hoping that our host will not feel slighted or offended. Either way, an invitation demands a response...as we are reminded in today's Gospel:

A king prepares a wedding banquet for his son and sends his servants forth with the invitations. Those invited first ignore the invite or decline with flimsy excuses. Some even abuse the messengers. This happens with a second group as well, so the king calls them out and widens his reach to include anyone willing to accept his invitation.

With that, his banquet hall is finally and wonderfully full – but not with people from any inner circle or realm of privilege, but with those from every walk and manner of life.

The parable invites us to consider how *we* respond to the divine invitation – do we say yes to the banquet of justice and peace, or do we make our excuses?

It *also* invites us to ponder just how our world has, and does, treat the messengers carrying that divine invitation. Do we honor them as grounded and courageous, or dismiss them as bleeding heart and bothersome liberals?

There is lesson enough in all that, but the parable does not end there.

As the celebration is underway, one guest is found without the proper attire, so he is cast out of the banquet and suffers deeply, along with others who rejected the invitation.

But wait – what kind of Gospel *is* this – a guest being condemned over his clothing?

Some background might be helpful here, as the matter of party attire has radically changed historically. In our time, choice of clothing is a form of personal expression, but in the first-century host would have provided a robe as people arrived. That was a great leveler, as each guest was equally attired.

There are parallels in our own day: Wearing a uniform – for school, work, or military service – might limit expression of personal style, yes, but for the sake of team building, common mission, and esprit de corps, individual status or station are not on display. We also see this in our burial rites. Whether an urn or casket is made of simple pine or pure gold, when we drape it with a funeral pall, there is no distinction among us...

...because in the eyes of our divine host, all are equally dressed.

It is likely no coincidence that the feast in this parable is a wedding – a sacrament of unity, sacred promises, and new life – and a host dearly eager for each one of us to join the celebration. Granted, that wedding guest may have accepted the invitation, but rejected the gracious offer to wear that robe. He seems to want the advantages of the feast without assuming equality with the other guests – the larger community of diverse and varied persons across all walks and manner of life.

Of course, there are other invitations in this world, trying to draw us into other gatherings, from hosts who offer a robe (or cover) of another kind – *not* a garment of love, *not* an emblem of inclusion, not a sign of community, but a cloak of deception, a mantle of greed, a cape of discord, and perhaps even the shawl of hate.

We may be tempted to become part of such gatherings, to align ourselves with those in exclusive clubs reserved for a certain personal type or tax bracket or political opinion, where the doors open only for those who look, speak, live, and worship, like us.

If we are honest, we may enjoy such circles and reap the benefits of our connections and advantages, but that often comes at an uncomfortable cost, and not only to those excluded from the feast of privilege, but from the *inside* as well, who must somehow ignore, become distanced from, or even calloused enough to enjoy ourselves while knowing that others are suffering in the world just outside our door.

It is not an easy threshold to balance or defend.

But for those of us who identify as Christian, there can be no halfway. We cannot simply attend the party, so to speak, without also wearing the garment offered by our divine host at that threshold. We dare not eat this bread and drink this wine and then go forth from this table and, each in our own ways, silently tolerate the exclusion, insult, or injury to others.

Remember, the invitation does not say, *Black Tie* – the *only* attire in this domain is that robe of justice, mercy, and peace – which is available to anyone and everyone in this world who longs to take an active part in the common good.

So, my friends, what will it be?

Will we accept the invitation of our divine host and take our place in the banquet hall...

...or will we make our excuses and send our regrets?

Amen.